

Golden age of railroads?

By ALAN H. (UPI) — Craig Burroughs is not another magazine like *Capitaine Vascovich*, but his firm, *Isleworth*, is buying short railroads because he thinks the trains are in for a golden age.

At a time when most railroad companies are complaining about too much truckage and not enough profit, Burroughs' Trans Action Associates has bought two branch lines and is negotiating for others.

"I don't mind being called an idealist," said Burroughs, 32.

"This is a very misunderstood field of endeavor. People have their stereotype opinion of the railroads. When they could no longer ride faster trains, they thought railroads were dying.

"I think the golden age for railroads is ahead of us."

Burroughs is not squaring off for a fight over customers with the nation's major railroads. But he is buying branch lines in rural areas that have been abandoned or neglected.

The firm three years ago bought the Louisiana-Maine Railroad Corp., which spans the 76 miles from Vidalia to Packton, La.

Burroughs said the firm's business has doubled and one pulpwood shipping firm has even eliminated using trucks and completely relies on the railroad.

"The secret?"

"Shipper satisfaction, pure and simple," he said.

"We've increased the frequency of service and changed the schedules to fit the needs of our customers."

He said the railroad is flexible enough to alter its schedule or run a

special train to accommodate a shipper faced with the need to speed up an emergency shipment.

"We've become time competitive," he said, adding that the firm also offers prices lower or competitive with other railroads or trucking firms.

Trans Action recently purchased a 28-mile railroad branch in southeastern Iowa, but the firm is still repairing the tracks. It also is negotiating for a 74-mile line in Illinois.

Burroughs' clients' initial repair costs of the old, often long-abandoned lines as well as the firm's ability to buy fuel and supplies in bulk cut into profits.

However, he says, "It is definitely not a daydream," he said. "There is a need for preserving valuable transportation services to areas that otherwise would not have them."

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